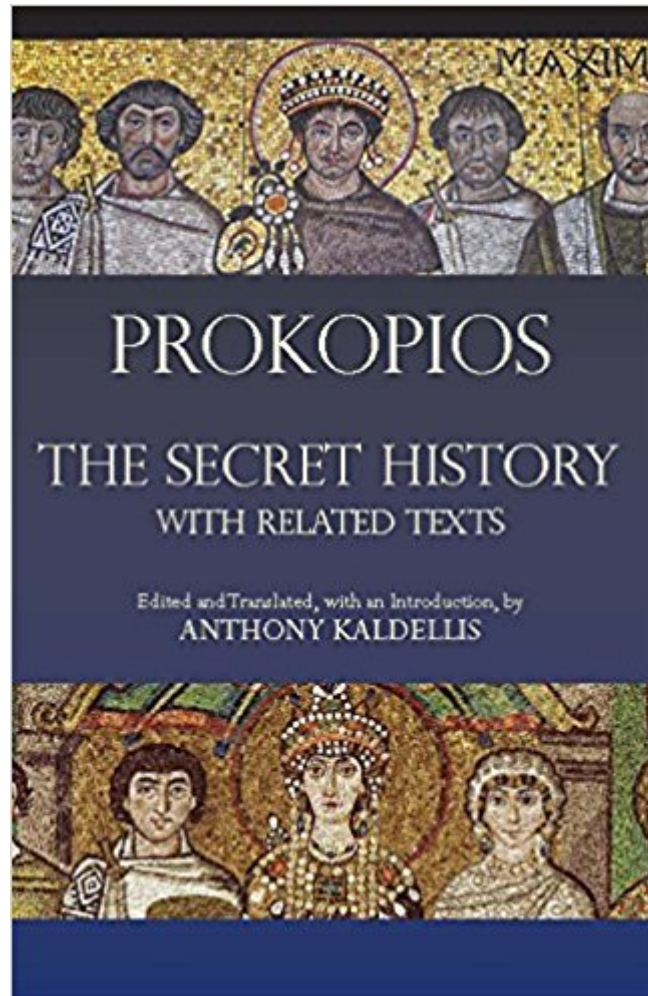




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The Secret History: With Related Texts (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

By exposing the perversion, repression, corruption, and injustice at the heart of Justinian's regime, Prokopios' *The Secret History* destroyed forever that emperor's reputation as the great and benevolent ruler of a vast Byzantine state. Faithfully rendered here in blunt and idiomatic English, Prokopios' tell-all is as shocking today as it was in the sixth century. Kaldellis' substantial Introduction addresses, among other topics, the historical background to *The Secret History*; Prokopios' literary style and major themes; and the relationships between Prokopios, Justinian, and Empress Theodora. Maps, genealogies, a glossary, and a selection of related texts (including excerpts from Prokopios' *Wars* and *Buildings* and several contemporary documents) enhance and support the reading of this scandalous and suspenseful book.

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Customer Reviews

By far the most accurate translation now available, with useful supporting documents for teaching, and a comprehensive and enlightening introduction that even experienced Byzantinists will want to read. --Michael Kulikowski, University of Tennessee This translation will be especially useful in undergraduate classes because, in the final section, Kaldellis appends translations of related passages from Prokopios's longer *History of the Wars*, from Justinian's legislation, and from other sixth-century primary sources. Students can use these passages to judge for themselves how accurately the *Secret History* portrayed Justinian's career as well as that of this controversial empress. Summing up: Essential. --T. S. Miller, Salisbury University, in *CHOICE* This is a fantastic

teaching text. . . . The translation is highly readable; the Introduction informative and useful; and the additional documents are a major plus. I look forward to using it again. --Charles Aull, Indiana University, Bloomington

Anthony Kaldellis is Professor of Greek and Latin, The Ohio State University.

The Secret history should be considered gold standard of insider exposes - and it happened to be written nearly 1500 years ago. Combining wit, insight, gossip, mudslinging, invective and polemic, Procopius, one of the scribes under the legendary Byzantine general Belisarius wrote a biting account of the failings and imperfections of the most powerful men and women of his time, starting with his boss and his wife and working his way up to the emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. Justinian is credited with bringing about the 'Golden Age' of Byzantium but as Procopius shows, the gold was merely plated on and it happened to be fool's gold. Justinian's reign saw the recovery of lands lost in Italy once the Western Roman Empire fell to the Goths, however, Procopius shows that most of these victories were hollow - the empire expended money and efforts to usually fight its adversaries to a stalemate and then made no effort to integrate these lands into the empire, leaving them vulnerable to reconquest. In Procopius' account, the villain of this piece is the autocratic Justinian, who saw himself as an absolute monarch ruling by divine right. Procopius shows that for all his piety and ambitions, Justinian was a poor and incompetent ruler who centralized power, imposed harsh taxes to fund his wars, induced 'barbarians' to attack the empire by buying them off with bribes thus encouraging other tribes to do the same and undermined all institutions of governance. His accomplice in all this was his wife Theodora, a former prostitute with whom Justinian was infatuated. Between the two, they patronized different church factions, Hippodrome gangs and formed an imperial clique of insiders who were accountable to none and had unbridled power. Procopius provides salacious details of the sex life of his protagonists and heaps abuse on them - calling Theodora a 'bitch' and Justinian a demon. At times his critique is biased and at other times clearly exaggerated but no one can deny the underlying insight into how the empire was being effectively hollowed out by the policies of the dictator in charge. As great as the core book is, this commentary by Anthony Kaldellis is a fantastic addition which provides lots of helpful context and identifies many of the cross-references between the Secret History and Procopius' other works. The introduction is a great help before delving into the core text as it supplies the background of the work and the circumstances in which it was written and also has sections on the reliability of Procopius as a historian. In summary, both the source material and the commentary around it are

fantastic and I would imagine that a lay reader without a substantial background in Byzantine history would struggle to make sense of the text without Anthony Kaldellis' helpful notes. This book has much more depth than the titillating accounts of sex and debauchery for which it is famous and it would be a shame if readers miss out the fundamental criticism of Justinian's reign and policies, for as the author says, it is probably the lasting legacy of this book alone which has prevented posterity from referring to this emperor as Justinian 'the Great'

This is perhaps one of the best ancient histories written, certainly one of the best about the Late Roman Empire. Its analysis of the deep character flaws of Justinian and his wife Theodora is one of the masterpieces of polemic writing at its best. It was called "The Secret History" because it could not be published while either Justinian or Theodora were alive, or the author would have suffered a terrible fate. The details are thick and convincing. The writing is wry, sly and deeply cutting, as well as relevant to today's world. Unlike Suetonius, who also wrote salacious stories about Emperors, Prokopios is quite likely to have accurate information, rather than just paid-for slanders of the dynasty previous to the Flavians. Prokopios also wrote two other books about Justinian and his era, which were published during his lifetime, but this one is an in-depth character analysis, slanted perhaps by the author's Republican leanings, but well worth reading.

"The Secret History" by Prokopios, a candid and scathing look at the inner workings of the empire of Justinian, translated, edited, and annotated by brilliant historian Anthony Kaldellis, is a window on corruption, depravity, arrogance, greed, destruction, plunder, and impunity of empire-builders and their subtending subversive coteries of all ages, looking behind the facades of self-aggrandizing pretensions to nobility, pious proclamations, and specious retrospective panegyrics offered as historiography. Prokopios effectively presages the catastrophic beginnings of our so-called New Millennium in its broad outlines. Among the great lessons of history, surely this is the most significant, and the most frightening. But, as history sadly demonstrates, history's great lessons are forever lost on those who hold sway over today and tomorrow, and over us.

This was my best possible choice for "The Secret History." The related texts are invaluable! James Conroyd Martin
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Fascinating with a wonderful translation.

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